

THE CENTER for CLINICAL MASSAGE

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Tendinitis

An injury that affects sports enthusiasts, office workers

Tendinitis can affect everyone from tennis players and golfers to warehouse and office workers. Known for painful inflammation (“itis” refers to inflammation), scarring of tendons, swelling, and a feeling of weakness, tendinitis inhibits proper muscle function.

Muscles form a part of our body’s locomotor system. They serve to provide movement and stability of our skeleton and internal organs. The tendon is the tissue at the end of the muscle that connects to the bone.

Common areas of pain

Tendinitis is sometimes confused with or occurs with a condition called “tendonosis,” a degenerative condition of the tendon, which also causes pain and dysfunction. The most common sites for both are the shoulder, arms, hip, hamstrings and the Achilles tendon. You may experience pain at the site of the injury or pain can be referred, or radiated, to areas distant from the injury.

The role of repetitive actions

Through repeated microtrauma, tendons can develop tiny scars. Repetitive strain injuries (RSI’s) develop from repeated movements and are characterized by pain, stiffness and tissue scarring. They often involve tendons that cannot adapt to forces placed upon them. Unless you’ve suddenly whacked your tendon, pain and dysfunction usually occur gradually through repeated trauma to the tendon. A thorough assessment will help determine the cause of your specific problem.



Injuries to tendons usually occur gradually from repeated movements at work or play.



Friction massage can be used to heal the forearm muscle and tendons involved in tennis elbow.

Massage technique for tendinitis

Cross-fiber friction reduces pain, helps heal

Cross-fiber friction massage was developed for treating injuries by Dr. James Cyriax, MD, who is sometimes called the father of orthopedic medicine. In cross-fiber friction, pressure is applied crosswise to the affected tissues for 2–5 minutes. The sensation can be numbing and uncomfortable. However, any pain should subside within minutes, and massage therapists make it a point to work within pain tolerance levels.

The case of tennis elbow

Tennis elbow is a painful condition involving micro-scarring deep within the

muscles and tendons of the forearm. These scars consist of fibers which are laid down randomly, limiting movement. To help heal the condition, deep friction is applied across the length of the forearm at the site of the injury. This is similar to rolling the fingers over a pile of toothpicks until they all reorient in the right direction.

Realigning the tissues with cross-fiber friction often requires a series of treatments. The goal is to reduce and mobilize areas of scar-like tissue, reduce pain, improve the overall function of the tendon, and restore muscle length and strength.

Massage therapy for tendon injuries

Specific techniques reduce pain and restore function

Massage is very effective in treating both acute and chronic tendon conditions. Massage therapists draw from an extensive background in clinical anatomy, and hands-on assessment and treatment skills. For tendon injuries, people often find short, regular visits reduce recovery time.

Why massage?

Massage relaxes and lengthens muscle groups in the area of injury and dysfunction. In addition, transverse or cross-fiber friction massage is often used on the area of the specific tendinitis, followed by ice. Massage also helps to ensure that the joint areas above and below the injury site (where applicable) stay relaxed and mobile.



Regular massage sessions can reduce recovery time from a tendon injury.

Warm and cold applications

Massage therapists often use hydrotherapy in addition to massage. When inflammation is present, ice may be applied as a natural pain reliever. After the major inflammation winds down, contrast hydrotherapy is often used to improve circulation to the injury site. This means that warm and cool applications are applied alternately on the area, several times each of warm and cool, ending with cool.

Finally, after a few weeks brief heat applications may be used, unless there is a flare-up of symptoms, in which case ice may again be applied. If your tendon is painful after work or exercise, you can use ice at home, following your therapist's guidelines, to reduce the body's inflammation response and relieve pain.



Strength that has effort in it is not what you need; you need the strength that is the result of ease.

—Ida Rolf, PhD, author of *Integration of Human Structures: Rolfing*